Cognitive Impasse and the Puppet Master of Society Revealed: A Framework of Mental Rigidity

10.6084/m9.figshare.28014626

Andrew Lehti
November 9, 2024

Part of the Collection of:
Cognitive Psychology and the Education System
https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.c.7532079

Learned behaviors and cognitive biases have perpetuated trait inheritance across generations, stemming from an education system established in the fourth century CE, forming a self-sustaining structure resembling a virus causing humans to deny change.

The Semmelweis Reflex is the tendency to reject new evidence because it contradicts established beliefs. Named after Ignaz Semmelweis, who introduced handwashing to reduce infections but was dismissed for challenging medical norms. After being dismissed from his position, he faced opposition and isolation within the medical community, as his handwashing theories were ridiculed and ignored. Eventually, he was committed to a mental asylum, where he reportedly became violent. Soon after his admission, he sustained a severe wound on his hand, potentially from a beating by the staff or another violent encounter, which led to sepsis. This infection caused his death at just 47.

Updated 12/12/2024

To address common concerns about accessibility, it is assured that no paywall will be implemented. This research will remain freely accessible, as research should inherently be open to all.

Methodology

The research focuses on investigating motives, behaviors, and observations while deliberately avoiding prior exposure to academic findings utilizing my approach which is **extrapolative trial by error.** This approach minimizes anchoring biases that could influence the thought process. After completing the study, academic material is reviewed comprehensively to evaluate alignment with the findings. Typically, the findings correspond closely with established principles, with exceptions limited to nuanced insights not yet formally recognized but widely observed in society. Few contradictions arise with established norms, apart from the integration of multiple established biases into more complex, composite biases that reflect broader systemic issues.

Lehti, Andrew (2024). Extrapolative Trial by Error. Journal contribution. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.27643080

Introduction

The cognitive impasse is a phenomenon that fosters a self-perpetuating cycle of mental rigidity, ensuring that the frameworks governing thought remain unchanged even as they are adopted by new individuals and institutions. This persistent recycling of identical intellectual structures—wrapped in new contexts and bodies—explains why the educational system has remained fundamentally unaltered for over 1,400 years. Originating from the Roman model of memory discipline and compliance, these paradigms have spread globally, embedding themselves into the fabric of schools, colleges, universities, and academic institutions worldwide.

While the tools, technologies, and methodologies of education have evolved, the underlying framework remains steadfast, prioritizing conformity and the avoidance of error over critical thinking and adaptability. The cognitive impasse not only sustains this system but also prevents those within it from seeing its flaws clearly—particularly if they are unwilling to confront the discomfort of challenging ingrained beliefs. This resistance to change ensures that educational paradigms persist, reinforcing societal stagnation masked as progress.

Preface

Here's an uncomfortable truth that took me nearly a decade to grasp: we thrive in the comfort of what's already established. But that comfort, over time, becomes a prison—rigid and unyielding, making change feel impossible. You can present endless data and irrefutable evidence, even on the smallest matters, and still, beliefs refuse to budge.

Take religion and science. They're profoundly different, as you'd expect, yet they share a curious commonality: both are shaped by human systems of thought and tradition. For instance, do you know who laid the foundation of our education system over 1,400 years ago? It has evolved in staggering ways and yet, paradoxically, not at all. Rote memorization—the backbone of that system—leaves the mind brittle, incapable of flexibility. We're at risk of losing something vital, all because we fail to recognize the nuances that render our education system obsolete.

When I speak like this, people often assume I'm against education. I'm not. What I advocate for is a radical overhaul—a complete dismantling of the old framework. My inspiration for a better future? Carl Sagan. He made science come alive for me in ways I didn't fully appreciate as a teenager, sparking curiosity and wonder. That's what education needs: genuine interest—not the passive grind of time spent on books, quizlets, and aptitude tests that we care very little for, but active engagement with ideas that ignite passion and creativity.

We humans are neither open-minded nor closed-minded**. Myself included and it takes only a conscious effort to overcome**. What we humans possess, I have termed: Selective Mindedness. Our minds open only to uncharted territories, to knowledge that doesn't challenge the established but ventures into the undefined cracks between our existing beliefs. Selective-mindedness is both a limitation and a call to action—a reminder that curiosity is the antidote to complacency. It's a belief that we can overcome this broken system and embrace a new, brighter future for next generations of humans.

Abstract

This study investigates the phenomenon of cognitive impasse, a self-sustaining cycle of mental rigidity perpetuated by learned behaviors and cognitive biases entrenched within educational systems dating back to the fourth century CE. Through an extrapolative trial-by-error methodology, the research examines how cognitive defenses, exemplified by the Semmelweis Reflex—the tendency to reject new evidence that contradicts established beliefs—maintain intellectual conformity and inhibit adaptability. The framework identifies various forms of dogma across religious, academic, political, and cultural domains, illustrating their collective role in reinforcing societal stagnation and preventing critical thinking.

Historical analysis traces the persistence of these rigid cognitive structures from the late Roman Empire to contemporary educational institutions, highlighting how these systems prioritize conformity and discourage innovation. Additionally, the study explores psychological mechanisms such as cognitive dissonance, belief perseverance, and the projection of inferiority, which further entrench mental rigidity and inhibit personal and societal growth. By advocating for educational reforms that emphasize experiential learning, self-awareness, and intellectual openness, the research proposes strategies to break free from cognitive impasse. The findings suggest that overcoming this rigidity requires a collective shift in mindset, positioning the human mind itself as both the architect and the jailer of societal progress. Ultimately, the study reveals that the true "puppet master" of societal control is the collective human psyche, conditioned to resist change and preserve established paradigms.

The Summary of a Cognitive Impasse

Cognitive impasses manifest as a spectrum of psychological, physical, and behavioral responses when confronting challenging information. Early signs include immediate physical reactions such as laughter, eye-rolling, or smirking, accompanied by verbal dismissals like sarcastic remarks or phrases such as "Yeah, right." These responses are often paired with non-verbal cues, including crossed arms or headshaking, which signal resistance. Internally, rapid categorization of new ideas as absurd or unworthy reflects cognitive defenses at play. The first three stages can occur within seconds, progressing to **Cognitive Dissonance Avoidance (Stage 4)**, where text may become incoherent as the brain slows down due to **Cognitive Inertia (Stage 2)**, followed closely by the **Semmelweis Reflex (Stage 3)**.

Behavioral Avoidance: Sudden urges to engage in unrelated tasks, excessive daydreaming, or even falling asleep may serve as escape mechanisms. Avoidance behaviors such as distractions or sudden fatigue deepen resistance. At this point, individuals may experience **Cognitive Dissonance (Stage 6)**, accompanied by physical symptoms like headaches, nausea, or feelings of intense guilt and impending doom if self-awareness of these reactions is ignored. Allowing self-awareness of the cognitive impasse, combined with openness to the conversation, can help alleviate these feelings. Biases and projection mechanisms, such as dismissing new ideas as implausible or labeling them conspiratorial, further reinforce the status quo. Recognizing these patterns—from subtle dismissal to entrenched belief perseverance—can help individuals identify and overcome barriers to engaging with new perspectives.

Lehti, Andrew (2024). When Death or Loss Makes Us Laugh: Unraveling the Emotional Paradox and Exploring the Connection Between Grief and Humor. figshare. Journal contribution. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.28014581

Stage 5: Imposition and Projection

- **Imposed Conformity:** A belief in collective powerlessness discourages efforts to enact change.
- **Projected Conformity:** Assuming others will conform leads individuals to conform themselves.
- **Galileo Fallacy:** This bias dismisses innovative ideas based on the assumption that established systems and experts have already accounted for them, stifling curiosity and innovation.
- **Imposing and Projecting Inferiority:** See Subsequent Page

Cognitive biases, of which over 200 have been identified, act as mental shortcuts to reinforce familiar perspectives, serving as a final defense to preserve pre-existing understandings **(Stage 7: Cognitive Biases).** Biases such as confirmation bias and selective recall prioritize existing beliefs over new evidence, offering comfort while stifling intellectual growth. If this process is unchecked, **Stage 8: Belief Perseverance** occurs. To break free from belief perseverance, individuals must engage in active self-examination and cultivate a mindset that embraces uncertainty and continuous growth.

The Effects of Projecting and Imposing Inferiority

These terms, while diverse, share a common undercurrent: a human tendency to assign blame for societal control and exploitation. However, this framework of perceived domination persists not through direct control, but through self-sustaining psychological mechanisms. For over 1,400 years, humanity has been trapped in a state of mental rigidity that perpetuates its own exploitation.

This phenomenon is driven by **invulnerability bias**, a subset of optimism bias, where individuals falsely believe they are immune to the manipulations that affect others. This bias reinforces complacency, enabling exploitative systems to thrive. Furthermore, **cognitive dissonance**—the discomfort of reconciling conflicting beliefs—prevents individuals from acknowledging their complicity or errors. Fear of admitting fault fosters an unwillingness to dismantle this framework, ensuring its persistence.

Ultimately, this cycle of projection, inferiority imposition, and self-perpetuation explains why the concept of a "Puppet Master" endures, despite no singular entity being in control. The human mind, through its biases and fears, constructs and maintains the very systems it seeks to overthrow.

Imposing Inferiority

Imposing inferiority occurs when someone else's success or abilities evoke personal insecurities, which manifest as internalized feelings of inadequacy, creating the belief that one is lesser in comparison.

Projecting Inferiority

Projecting inferiority is the outward expression of internal insecurity, where resentment leads to dismissing, criticizing, or undermining those whose accomplishments seem to highlight one's perceived shortcomings.

The Cycle

The cycle begins with imposed inferiority leading to projection, which can instill doubt in others, perpetuating their own feelings of inadequacy and projection, forming a self-sustaining loop of negativity.

Lehti, Andrew (2024). Standardized Obedience: The Suppression of Critical Thinking, Innovation, and Creativity in Worldwide Conformity-Driven Education Systems.. figshare. Journal contribution. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.28015913

Types of Dogma

There is more to dogma than a singular domain, as it manifests wherever human systems seek certainty or permanence, often at the expense of curiosity and flexibility.

1. **Religious Dogma** represents the immovable truths of faith, embraced as sacrosanct, immune to questioning or reinterpretation.
2. **Academic Dogma** emerges in the intellectual halls, where established theories or methods harden into unquestioned orthodoxy, resisting innovation.
3. **Political Dogma** arises when ideologies or policies solidify into rigid frameworks, accepted without examination of their evolving relevance or consequences.
4. **Cultural Dogma** shapes identities through traditions and practices so ingrained they resist adaptation, even when change becomes inevitable.
5. **Social Dogma** defines the codes of human interaction, mandating behaviors that align with collective norms, often at odds with individuality or diversity.
6. **Economic Dogma** manifests in unwavering allegiance to specific systems or theories, often ignoring the complexities of a dynamic world and the past.
7. **Scientific Dogma** paradoxically arises in a discipline founded on skepticism, where once-revolutionary paradigms become entrenched as immutable truths.
8. **Philosophical Dogma** finds form in schools of thought that, instead of exploring alternatives, insist upon their singular validity, or believe that the old is obsolete.
9. **Technological Dogma** is visible in the unyielding embrace of certain tools or processes, often mistaken for progress itself, rather than as a means to an end.
10. **Environmental Dogma** takes root in absolute positions about ecology and sustainability, sometimes overlooking nuance or competing priorities.
11. **Legal Dogma** thrives in interpretations of justice that cling to precedent without acknowledging the fluidity of human contexts and words.
12. **Corporate Dogma** is the byproduct of organizations that mistake their policies or traditions for inviolable truths, often at odds with adaptability.
13. **Artistic Dogma** limits creativity when specific forms or standards are elevated as the only valid expressions of beauty or meaning.

Dogma, in all its forms, represents a comforting rigidity—a shield against uncertainty. Yet it risks becoming a barrier to growth, a force that halts evolution by confining thought to predefined boundaries. To transcend dogma is to embrace the fluidity of understanding, the courage to question, and the humility to adapt.

Selective Mindset

Throughout history, humans have shown a consistent tendency to align themselves with systems of belief that offer structure and certainty. These systems—whether religious, political, academic, or cultural—become self-perpetuating, discouraging dissent and critical examination. While they provide a sense of stability, they often do so at the expense of intellectual and social progress.

In the late Roman Empire, as the intellectual focus transitioned to a Christian-centered worldview, the shift brought with it an emphasis on dogma. Hierarchical and rigid in nature, this mindset became the foundation of medieval monastic schools and universities. These institutions cultivated a way of thinking that prioritized adherence over inquiry. Though the figure of God dominated this intellectual era, the system's structure was less about the divine and more about perpetuating authority. Dissent was not tolerated, and the flexibility required for innovation was systematically suppressed.

This pattern is not confined to the past. In modern times, similar structures of conformity persist. Political ideologies, academic institutions, and cultural norms maintain a comparable rigidity, where questioning the status quo often provokes anger or defensiveness. In my own experience, criticizing political systems frequently leads to being labeled according to existing categories: Trump supporter, Democrat, Libertarian, Green Party member. Even when I reject all of these affiliations, the response is not curiosity but insistence on finding a label that fits. It's as though the act of existing outside the established framework is more unsettling than holding a polarizing view within it.

For instance, I find the Democratic Party's slogan, "vote blue no matter who," emblematic of a deeper issue. Rather than focusing on meaningful reform, the slogan prioritizes loyalty to the party itself. To me, this reveals an approach more concerned with consolidating power than addressing systemic challenges. Yet when I voice this perspective, I'm met with accusations of supporting their opponents or promoting apathy—neither of which reflects my position.

When I suggest more radical alternatives, such as abolishing political parties altogether in favor of a zero-party system, the backlash intensifies. Instead of engaging with the idea's merits or implications, critics resort to extreme comparisons, labeling me a Nazi or a supporter of authoritarianism. This reaction underscores a widespread inability to move beyond entrenched frameworks. Many claim to reject conformity, yet their thinking remains firmly rooted in the systems they claim to question.

This mindset extends to academia and education, where critique is often perceived as an attack on the institution itself. Pointing out the flaws in our educational systems—such as their tendency to prioritize conformity over creativity—elicits defensiveness. People accuse critics of being anti-education or dismissive of human progress. Yet, this response reveals an unwillingness to confront imperfections within the systems they value. It mirrors a pattern of behavior seen in abusive relationships, where victims defend their abuser because the alternative—acknowledging the abuse—requires a fundamental reevaluation of their reality.

The same rigidity permeates broader social and cultural systems. When people hear ideas that challenge their understanding of the world, they often react with hostility, not because the ideas lack merit, but because they threaten the stability of the frameworks they rely on for meaning. This behavior is not limited to the uninformed; even those who pride themselves on open-mindedness often exhibit selective thinking, rejecting what does not align with their existing worldview while claiming to value critical thought.

What we see, then, is not an absence of thinking but a deep reluctance to step outside the bounds of established systems. True intellectual freedom requires more than rejecting individual ideologies; it demands a willingness to question the structures that underpin them. It requires embracing complexity and uncertainty as essential components of understanding.

The resistance to change is a constant, but it is not insurmountable. Progress depends on challenging entrenched systems and confronting the discomfort that comes with it. If history teaches us anything, it is that meaningful change only occurs when individuals dare to think beyond the familiar, even in the face of opposition.

The door to understanding, to change, to progress—these are things no one can open for you. The effort, the courage, the willingness to confront what lies on the other side, these must come from within. Others may point you to the door, even show you the key, but the act of turning it, of stepping through, is yours alone. No one can take that step for you, nor should they. It is only by opening the door yourself that you gain the strength, the insight, and the transformation that await beyond it.

Lehti, Andrew (2024). Selective-Mindedness: An Introduction and the Illusion of Open-Mindedness. figshare. Journal contribution. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.27642519

The Puppet Master(s)

Throughout history, various terms have been employed to conceptualize those perceived as wielding power and control over societies. These terms reflect different frameworks and cultural contexts:

1. **Aristocracy**: Governance by the noble or elite class.
2. **Oligarchy**: Power concentrated in the hands of a few individuals or families.
3. **Plutocracy**: Rule by the wealthy.
4. **Bourgeoisie**: The capitalist middle class, as theorized in Marxist ideology.
5. **The Powers That Be (TPTB)**: A reference to established authorities or governing bodies.
6. **The Elite**: A small, privileged group holding disproportionate power and influence.
7. **The Ruling Class**: The class that controls political and economic systems.
8. **The Man**: A colloquial term, particularly popular in the 1960s–70s, symbolizing oppressive authority.
9. **The System**: The overarching socio-political and economic framework that dictates societal norms.
10. **Status Quo**: The existing state of affairs, often maintained by dominant entities.
11. **The Old Guard**: Traditionalists or entrenched power holders resistant to change.
12. **The Cathedral**: A term in modern intellectual discourse describing the interconnected elite in media, academia, and politics.
13. **The Government**: Broadly referencing institutionalized power structures.
14. **The Deep State**: A hidden network of entrenched bureaucrats and elites exerting influence.
15. **The Hierarchy**: An organized ranking system dominated by elites.
16. **The Crony Class**: Individuals benefiting from connections to power.
17. **The Establishment Media**: Media outlets aligned with mainstream or elite interests.
18. **The Court**: Historically referring to the king's advisors or ruling elites.
19. **The 1%**: A contemporary term highlighting economic inequality and elite dominance.
20. **The Corporate Class**: Leaders of large corporations as significant power players.
21. **The Rulers**: A general term for those in positions of authority.
22. **The Machine**: A metaphor for the impersonal, mechanistic systems of power.
23. **The Cabal**: A secretive group of elites, often with conspiratorial implications.
24. **The Establishmentarians**: Advocates and defenders of the existing establishment.
25. **The Military-Industrial Complex**: A powerful coalition of military, governmental, and industrial interests, famously described by President Eisenhower.
26. **Lizard People:** Another ancient term for religious oligarchs.

The Story of Cognitive Impasse: How Minds Resist Change

For thirteen years or more, we're shaped by a system that values correctness above all else. From the moment we enter school, we learn that success is tied to the right answers, while mistakes signal failure. This binary framework creates a survival-oriented mindset—a world where deviation from the expected isn't just frowned upon but feels like a personal flaw. Slowly, our ability to take risks, think creatively, and adapt begins to shrink, replaced by a mechanical reliance on rote learning.

This early conditioning lays the groundwork for a deeply human phenomenon: the cognitive impasse. When faced with information that conflicts with our established beliefs, the brain reacts as if it's under attack. It's not a metaphor—this reaction is physiological. A tight gut, headaches, rapid heartbeat, or an instinct to change the subject and deflect attention are all signs of the fight-or-flight response in action. Instead of engaging with new ideas, we retreat into the safety of what we already know.

And it doesn't stop there. Over time, we develop behaviors to protect our intellectual comfort zones. We justify our beliefs, avoid responsibility for inaccuracies, and surround ourselves with people and information that reinforce what we already think. These self-reinforcing habits create a loop—a mental fortress designed to keep discomfort at bay.

The Journey Through Cognitive Impasse

When this cycle begins, the first line of defense is almost reflexive. A new or challenging idea might spark laughter, mockery, followed by an instant dismissal via the Semmelweis Reflex. It's a coping mechanism—a buffer to keep cognitive discomfort at a safe distance. But as this reaction deepens, something more insidious sets in: inertia. The gears of intellectual engagement grind to a halt. Even the most compelling arguments can't penetrate, and the mind clings to old patterns.

Eventually, this resistance hardens into outright rejection. Novel ideas, no matter how valid, are dismissed without consideration. This isn't a calculated decision; it's automatic—a defense mechanism to preserve mental equilibrium. Avoidance behaviors follow: forgetting inconvenient information, steering clear of uncomfortable discussions, or physically withdrawing from situations that challenge our worldview.

The final stage is one of entrenchment. The beliefs we started with become rigid frameworks, immovable and impermeable. Adaptability fades, intellectual growth stalls, and the cycle of cognitive impasse reaches its peak.

How Education Fuels the Cycle

The roots of this phenomenon lie in the very systems designed to educate us. Formal education often prioritizes conformity and compliance over creativity and inquiry. Mistakes aren't opportunities to learn—they're penalized. Standardized tests demand predefined answers, leaving little room for exploration. Students internalize a fear of failure so pervasive that taking risks becomes unthinkable.

This survival-oriented approach doesn't just teach knowledge; it trains students to avoid it—at least the kind that challenges their understanding. Fear of being "wrong" becomes a barrier, locking minds into a binary way of thinking where curiosity is the first casualty.

Breaking Free: The Path to Cognitive Flexibility

Escaping the cycle of cognitive impasse requires conscious effort. It's not easy, but the first step is cultivating *self-awareness.* Pay attention to how you react to ideas that challenge your beliefs. Do you feel tension? Frustration? By recognizing these physical and emotional cues, you can begin to identify patterns of resistance.

From there, *intellectual openness* becomes the goal. Approach unfamiliar perspectives with curiosity rather than judgment. Ask questions. Challenge norms. The willingness to entertain new ideas is the foundation of intellectual freedom.

Education, too, must change. *Experiential learning*—hands-on, exploratory, and focused on understanding rather than correctness—can reignite curiosity. Exercises in *cognitive flexibility* that encourage alternative viewpoints and creative solutions help dismantle rigid mental frameworks.

Finally, confronting *avoidance behaviors* is crucial. When an idea makes you uncomfortable, lean into it. Recognize the discomfort as a natural defense mechanism and work through it. Collaborative environments can also play a vital role, exposing blind spots and broadening perspectives through dialogue with people from diverse backgrounds.

Rewriting the Future

Cognitive impasse doesn't have to be a permanent state. By understanding its mechanisms and actively challenging its hold on us, we can break free. Education, communication, and self-awareness can shift the way we process information, making us not just more knowledgeable but more adaptable and empathetic.

The real challenge is simple: Are we willing to face discomfort, question the familiar, and embrace the unknown? That's the true test—and the ultimate reward—of breaking the cycle.

The Fight or Flight Response in Cognitive Dissonance

When faced with information that challenges their beliefs, these individuals experience a fight or flight response, a reaction shaped by their educational experiences. Here's how this manifests in adulthood:

1. **Fear of Being Wrong as a Survival Mechanism**: The education system's emphasis on correctness and punishment for mistakes instills a sense of threat around being wrong. Linking academic success to future security makes cognitive challenges feel like threats to self-worth and safety.

2. **Sympathetic Nervous System Activation**: Confronting beliefs that are challenged triggers the fight or flight response, releasing stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. This leads to physical symptoms such as a tight stomach, rapid heartbeat, or nausea, which are tied to the discomfort of cognitive dissonance.

3. **Self-Protection through Manipulation**: To avoid feeling wrong, individuals may subconsciously maintain their beliefs at all costs, sometimes engaging in self-deception or manipulative behaviors. This internal drive to "be right" serves as a shield against cognitive dissonance, preventing them from fully processing contradictory information.

4. **Belief Perseverance as a Defense Mechanism**: Unable to acknowledge mistakes, adults often double down on their original beliefs when faced with conflicting information. This reaction, known as belief perseverance, reinforces existing views to avoid the discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance.

5. **Conditioned Subconscious Compliance and Intellectual Rigidity**: The aversion to mistakes contributes to cognitive inertia and a tendency to comply with established norms. Adults become rigid when encountering new ideas, prioritizing self-justification over genuine understanding.

The education system's focus on correctness as a survival trait leads to adults who perceive cognitive dissonance as a threat. This instinctive response creates a cycle of belief perseverance, avoidance, and self-deception, establishing mental and physiological barriers against cognitive flexibility and growth.

Our education systems are deeply intertwined with our natural instincts for survival. From a young age, we find ourselves in settings where we are constantly compared to others, using these comparisons to gauge our self-worth. When we don't meet the standards set by external benchmarks, it can lead to feelings of inadequacy.

Originally, learning was driven by curiosity and the joy of discovery. However, today it often revolves around memorization and repetition, rewarding those who follow instructions rather than those who seek true understanding. This environment encourages conformity and adherence to established norms, while discouraging the very deviation that sparks creativity and progress.

As time passes, academic performance becomes linked to our ability to survive and adapt. The belief that poor grades predict a less fulfilling life becomes ingrained in our minds. This fear of failure isn't just about not succeeding academically; it's about the underlying belief that mistakes could hinder our ability to thrive in an ever-changing world.

This kind of conditioning doesn't just influence our actions—it fundamentally changes the way we think. Over years, this framework becomes so ingrained that facing conflicting ideas triggers a psychological panic, pushing us to stick with what we know rather than explore new possibilities.

The current education system heavily emphasizes standardized testing and memorization, instilling a fear of making mistakes from an early age. For over a decade, students are taught to prioritize getting the right answers over genuine understanding or innovative thinking. Mistakes are often viewed as failures rather than opportunities to learn, creating a lifelong fear of being wrong.

This approach affects cognitive development by encouraging rote memorization over critical thinking and curiosity. Imagination, once a natural part of learning, becomes suppressed as students realize there is little room for creativity in standardized tests. This shift changes motivations from a desire to learn to a need to avoid errors, stripping away the intrinsic joy of learning and replacing it with a mechanical drive to "get it right."

As adults, individuals often struggle to admit mistakes or embrace new perspectives because doing so challenges the beliefs instilled in them during their education. They may avoid situations that could expose gaps in their knowledge, hindering personal and professional growth. Instead of becoming adaptable thinkers, they remain stuck in patterns that avoid risk and innovation, limiting their creativity and ability to think outside the box.

Conclusion

Throughout this exploration, the forces shaping beliefs, behaviors, and mental patterns may have seemed external—ancient systems, societal structures, or educational frameworks. However, the truth reveals something far more profound.

The mind, molded by years of conditioning and internalized fear, is both the architect and the jailer. This revelation is not a burden but a gift, as it places the power for change firmly within reach. The cognitive impasse is not an unbreakable chain; it is a construct awaiting dismantling.

The power to overcome lies within the ability to question, reflect, and adapt. The only chains that endure are those willingly left unbroken. In the end, it becomes clear: the Puppet Master has always been us.

A Shift in Purpose:

The ultimate goal of education must be the cultivation of resilient, curious minds—minds that dare to challenge assumptions, venture into the unknown, and embrace complexity. We must strive to raise thinkers who are not only capable of solving problems but who also have the courage to redefine what problems mean.

Understanding transcends knowledge, and knowledge, in isolation, will never yield understanding. A reimagined educational system must serve to bridge this gap, fostering not just students, but innovators, stewards, and explorers of our collective future.

Next in the series:

Lehti, Andrew (2024). **Standardized Obedience**: The Suppression of Critical Thinking, Innovation, and Creativity in Worldwide Conformity-Driven Education Systems. figshare. Journal contribution. **https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.28015913**

References:

1. Dweck, C. S., & Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review*, 95(2), 256-273. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.95.2.256

2. Rattan, A., Good, C., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). “It's ok — Not everyone can be good at math”: Instructors with an entity theory comfort (and demotivate) students. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(3), 731-737. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.12.012

3. Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational Beliefs, Values, and Goals. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53(1), 109-132. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135153

4. Rangel, U., & Keller, J. (2011). Essentialism goes social: Belief in social determinism as a component of psychological essentialism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100(6), 1056-1078. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022401

5. Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2), 203-210. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0041593

6. Anderson, C. A., Lepper, M. R., & Ross, L. (1980). Perseverance of social theories: The role of explanation in the persistence of discredited information. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39(6), 1037-1049. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0077720

7. Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo. *Political Psychology*, 25(6), 881-919. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00402.x

8. Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(6), 1121-1134. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1121

9. Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(2), 175-220. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175

10. Dougherty, M. R. P., Gettys, C. F., & Ogden, E. E. (1999). MINERVA-DM: A memory processes model for judgments of likelihood. *Psychological Review*, 106(1), 180-209. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.106.1.180

11. Hilbert, M. (2012). Toward a synthesis of cognitive biases: How noisy information processing can bias human decision making. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(2), 211-237. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025940

12. Alexander, W. H., & Brown, J. W. (2010). Hyperbolically Discounted Temporal Difference Learning. *Neural Computation*, 22(6), 1511-1527. https://doi.org/10.1162/neco.2010.08-09-1080

13. Dardenne, B., & Leyens, J. (1995). Confirmation Bias as a Social Skill. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 21(11), 1229-1239. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672952111011

14. MacCoun, R. J. (1998). BIASES IN THE INTERPRETATION AND USE OF RESEARCH RESULTS. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49(1), 259-287. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.259

15. Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. *Science*, 185(4157), 1124-1131. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.185.4157.1124

16. Fiedler, K. (1991). The tricky nature of skewed frequency tables: An information loss account of distinctiveness-based illusory correlations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(1), 24-36. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.1.24

17. Schwarz, N., Bless, H., Strack, F., Klumpp, G., Rittenauer-Schatka, H., & Simons, A. (1991). Ease of retrieval as information: Another look at the availability heuristic. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61(2), 195-202. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.61.2.195

18. Klauer, K. C., Musch, J., & Naumer, B. (2000). On belief bias in syllogistic reasoning. *Psychological Review*, 107(4), 852-884. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.107.4.852

19. Sanna, L. J., Schwarz, N., & Stocker, S. L. (2002). When debiasing backfires: Accessible content and accessibility experiences in debiasing hindsight. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 28(3), 497-502. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-7393.28.3.497

20. Jeng, M. (2006). A selected history of expectation bias in physics. *American Journal of Physics*, 74(7), 578-583. https://doi.org/10.1119/1.2186333

21. Pronin, E., & Kugler, M. B. (2007). Valuing thoughts, ignoring behavior: The introspection illusion as a source of the bias blind spot. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(4), 565-578. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2006.05.011

22. Marks, G., & Miller, N. (1987). Ten years of research on the false-consensus effect: An empirical and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 102(1), 72-90. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.102.1.72

23. Rozenblit, L., & Keil, F. (2002). The misunderstood limits of folk science: an illusion of explanatory depth. *Cognitive Science*, 26(5), 521-562. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15516709cog2605_1

24. Patt, A. (2000). No title. *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, 21(1), 45-72. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1026517309871

25. Laibson, D. (1997). Golden Eggs and Hyperbolic Discounting. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112(2), 443-478. https://doi.org/10.1162/003355397555253

26. RATH, J. (2004). The construct of problem solving in higher level neuropsychological assessment and rehabilitation*1. *Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology*, 19(5), 613-635. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acn.2003.08.006

27. Rath, J. F., Hradil, A. L., Litke, D. R., & Diller, L. (2011). Clinical applications of problem-solving research in neuropsychological rehabilitation: Addressing the subjective experience of cognitive deficits in outpatients with acquired brain injury. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 56(4), 320-328. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025817

28. Hoppmann, C. A., & Blanchard-Fields, F. (2010). Goals and everyday problem solving: Manipulating goal preferences in young and older adults. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(6), 1433-1443. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020676

29. Ewert, P. H., & Lambert, J. F. (1932). Part II: The Effect of Verbal Instructions upon the Formation of a Concept. *The Journal of General Psychology*, 6(2), 400-413. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221309.1932.9711880

30. Armstrong, J., Denniston, W. B., & Gordon, M. M. (1975). The use of the decomposition principle in making judgments. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 14(2), 257-263. https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(75)90028-8

31. Ash, I. K., Jee, B. D., & Wiley, J. (2012). Investigating Insight as Sudden Learning. *The Journal of Problem Solving*, 4(2). https://doi.org/10.7771/1932-6246.1123

32. Chronicle, E. P., MacGregor, J. N., & Ormerod, T. C. (2004). What Makes an Insight Problem? The Roles of Heuristics, Goal Conception, and Solution Recoding in Knowledge-Lean Problems. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 30(1), 14-27. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-7393.30.1.14

33. Chu, Y., & MacGregor, J. N. (2011). Human Performance on Insight Problem Solving: A Review. *The Journal of Problem Solving*, 3(2). https://doi.org/10.7771/1932-6246.1094

34. Wang, Y., & Chiew, V. (2010). On the cognitive process of human problem solving. *Cognitive Systems Research*, 11(1), 81-92. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogsys.2008.08.003

35. Hergovich, A., Schott, R., & Burger, C. (2010). Biased Evaluation of Abstracts Depending on Topic and Conclusion: Further Evidence of a Confirmation Bias Within Scientific Psychology. *Current Psychology*, 29(3), 188-209. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-010-9087-5

36. Allen, M. (2011). Theory‐led confirmation bias and experimental persona. *Research in Science & Technological Education*, 29(1), 107-127. https://doi.org/10.1080/02635143.2010.539973

37. Wason, P. C. (1960). On the Failure to Eliminate Hypotheses in a Conceptual Task. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 12(3), 129-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/17470216008416717

38. Lehti, A. (2024a). Familiarity phenomenon: Autonormia. 253198 Bytes. https://doi.org/10.6084/M9.FIGSHARE.26826499

39. Lehti, A. (2024b). Polar jections: introduction to the conjective and perjective types. 186323 Bytes. https://doi.org/10.6084/M9.FIGSHARE.27273132

40. Lehti, A. (2024c). Utilizing photoelectromagnetic degradation imagery for enhanced forensic assessment. 4195510 Bytes. https://doi.org/10.6084/M9.FIGSHARE.27308148

41. Lehti, A. (2024d). volume six: cognitive defensiveness: Infamicate. 96964 Bytes. https://doi.org/10.6084/M9.FIGSHARE.27098722

42. Lehti, A. (2024e). Volume two: Pertaining to the origin: espresso. 166854 Bytes. https://doi.org/10.6084/M9.FIGSHARE.26827120

43. Lehti, A. (2024). Andylehti/triadic-personality-framework [Python]. https://github.com/andylehti/Triadic-Personality-Framework (Original work published 2024)

44. Li, W., Cui, H., Zhu, Z., Kong, L., Guo, Q., Zhu, Y., Hu, Q., Zhang, L., Li, H., Li, Q., Jiang, J., Meyers, J., Li, J., Wang, J., Yang, Z., & Li, C. (2016). Aberrant functional connectivity between the amygdala and the temporal pole in drug-free generalized anxiety disorder. Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2016.00549

45. Warren, S. L., Zhang, Y., Duberg, K., Mistry, P., Cai, W., Qin, S., Bostan, S.-N., Padmanabhan, A., Carrion, V. G., & Menon, V. (2020). Anxiety and stress alter decision-making dynamics and causal

amygdala-dorsolateral prefrontal cortex circuits during emotion regulation in children. Biological Psychiatry, 88(7), 576–586. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2020.02.011

Additional Sources

1. **Beard, M.** (2015). *SPQR: A history of ancient Rome*. Liveright.
2. **Bowman, A. K., Garnsey, P., & Rathbone, D.** (Eds.). (2000). *The Cambridge ancient history, Volume XI: The high empire, A.D. 70–192*. Cambridge University Press.
3. **Clark, A.** (2004). *The fathers and the children: Memory in early Christianity*. Oxford University Press.
4. **Gwynn, D. M.** (2014). *Christianity in the later Roman empire: A sourcebook*. Bloomsbury Academic.
5. **Illich, I.** (1971). *Deschooling society*. Harper & Row.
6. **Jaeger, W.** (1943). *Paideia: The ideals of Greek culture, Volume III: The conflict of cultural ideals in the age of Plato*. Oxford University Press.
7. **Kaster, R. A.** (1988). *Guardians of language: The grammarian and society in late antiquity*. University of California Press.
8. **Marrou, H. I.** (1956). *A history of education in antiquity* (G. Lamb, Trans.). University of Wisconsin Press.
9. **Marrou, H. I.** (1982). *A history of education in antiquity* (G. Lamb, Trans.). University of Wisconsin Press.
10. **Quintilian.** *Institutio oratoria*.
11. **Riché, P.** (1978). *Education and culture in the barbarian West: From the sixth through the eighth century*. University of South Carolina Press.